

Could Your Practice Benefit from a Change in Administrative Leadership?

By **Margie Satinsky**

Managing a medical practice requires both strategic vision and operational skills. Ongoing changes in reimbursement, technology and the legislative landscape make the job challenging, regardless of the training and experience of the individual responsible for the job.

What's the right administrative approach for your practice? There are big differences in the education and experience of an office manager, practice manager and practice administrator.

We recommend starting with the needs of the practice, not with the availability of someone you know who might be interested in making a job change or with a well-meaning but inexperienced relative who is willing to work for a low salary.

Ask the following questions about the current management of the practice. If the responses suggest a need for help, develop a job description and recruit. Don't put the cart before the horse!

What Does Your Practice Need?

Daily Practice Operations

- Do the current methods for overseeing daily practice operations meet the needs of patients, physicians, managers and staff?
- Do staff members work as a team to identify and resolve operational problems on a timely basis?
- Does the practice clearly communicate practice plans, policies and procedures to all who need to know the information on a timely basis?

Planning and Marketing

- Is there a strategic business plan that guides the practice's thinking and is regularly updated?
- Is the practice well informed about demographic trends, community dynamics, new laws and regulations and the competitive environment?
- Is there a marketing plan that supports the strategic business plan?
- Has the practice identified external professionals who can help it accomplish its goals?

Financial Management

- Does the practice have both operating and capital budgets that support the strategic plan?
- Is there a comprehensive revenue cycle management system that enables the practice to meet its financial goals?
- Does the practice have a managed care strategy that helps it maximize revenue and monitor actual vs. expected payments?
- Is there a clear understanding of Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) and other value-based methods of payment that encompasses how they work and how the savings/losses will be distributed?

Human Resources

- Does the practice have a history of high staff turnover?
- Are responsibilities and accountabilities clear?
- Does every employee have a clear job description and understand job expectations?

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- Does the practice have and use a formal performance evaluation system?
- Is there a formal orientation program for all administrative and clinical staff?
- Is there a formal system for physician recruitment, hiring, orientation and performance?

Facilities

- Does the current facility meet current and projected needs?

Information Technology

- Does the practice use information technology to support both administration and the direct provision of patient care?
- Is every staff member trained to use the information technology solutions that are currently in place?
- Does the practice expect to make major changes in information technology, and if so, have decisions already been made?

Quality Measurement and Improvement

- Does the practice respond on a timely basis to patient complaints and

questions about claims?

- Does the practice use satisfaction surveys for both patients and physician colleagues?
- Does the practice understand the requirements of different systems for measuring quality (e.g. Patient Centered Medical Home, Meaningful Use)?
- Does the practice use its software and reporting capabilities to profile the care provided to individuals and groups of patients?
- Does the practice benchmark itself against acceptable standards and take measures to improve the care that it provides?

Legal and Regulatory Compliance

- Does the practice have and use a compliance plan?
- Is the practice compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) laws and regulations and other requirements?
- Are annual coding audits included in the compliance program?

Obtaining Outside Help When Needed

- Does the practice know what it knows and where there are gaps in knowledge?
- Does the practice engage external consultants to help with tasks that cannot be performed internally?
- Does the practice manage the external consultants that it has identified as appropriate resources for the practice?

Recruiting the Right Individual

If the responses to the questions above suggest that your practice might benefit from a change in administrative leadership, develop a job description. Specify priorities, day-to-day responsibilities, reporting relationship, supervisory responsibility and required education and experience.

Establish a starting salary range with room for growth. Advertise online and select the health care management organizations that can assist with recruitment. Two reliable resources are North Carolina Medical Group Managers (www.ncmgm.org) and Medical Group Management Association's (MGMA) administrative partner, HealthCareers.com.

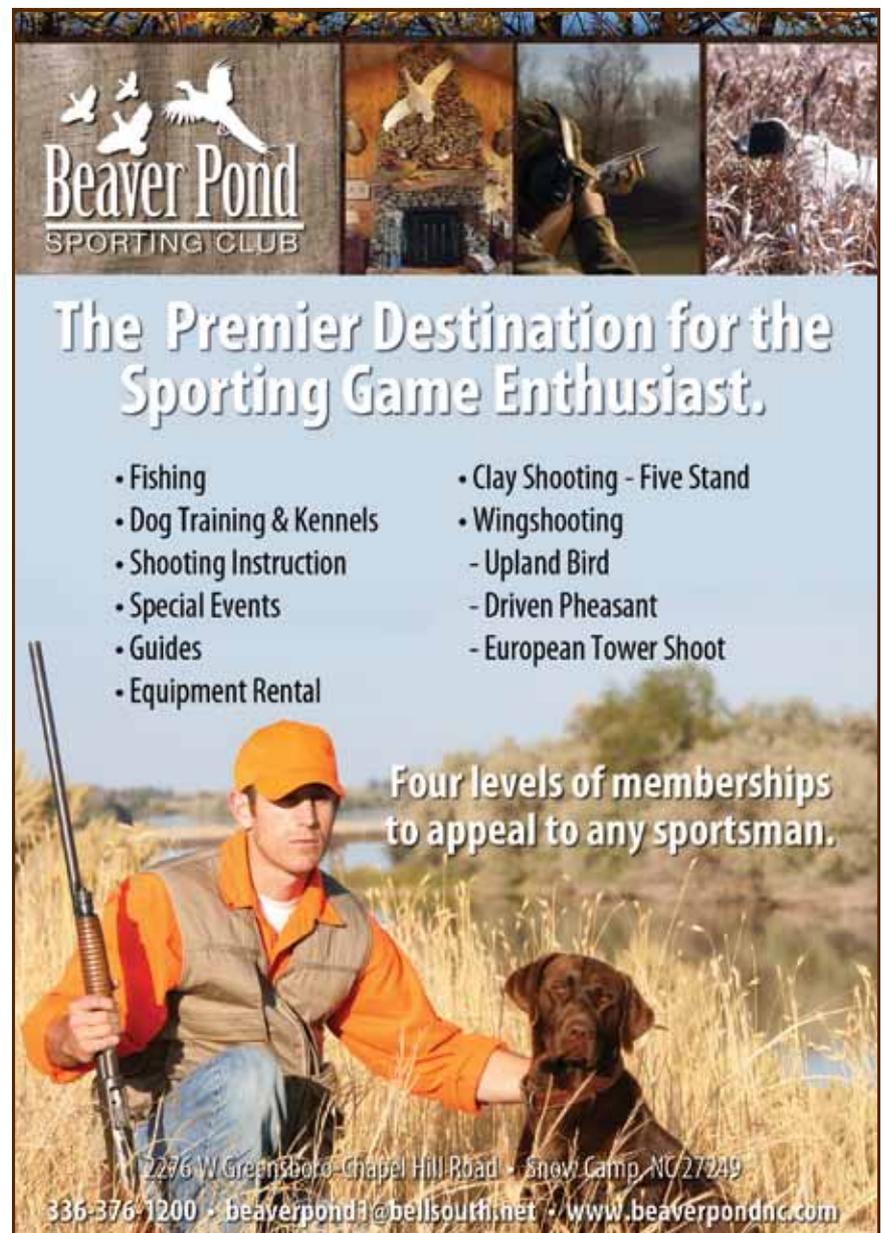
Conduct telephone interviews using a set list of questions and identify candidates whom you would like to meet in person. Following personal interviews, check references carefully. Make a verbal offer fol-

lowed by a written offer to your candidate of choice. A written employment contract is optional. If you prefer to use this approach, seek legal guidance.

Conclusion

The best way to ensure outstanding administrative leadership for your practice is to start with your needs, develop a clear job description and then recruit. The best results come from taking the right steps in the right order.

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